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Presidents Notes

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President's Notes

During the last 25 years, the United States has been the leading actor on the international stage. Responding to direct threats to global and regional peace and stability, American policymakers and military forces have been employed throughout the world to protect our interests and those of our friends and allies.

While we did not have open hostilities there, a great deal of our energies were directed toward Europe in containing the Soviet Union and maintaining the delicate balance between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Recent events in that theater reveal that our political and defense policies have been most successful. The crumbling of the Berlin Wall and the rush of Central European satellites to cast aside communist governments are ample evidence of our victory in the Cold War.

Asia has also demanded an enormous amount of our attention. The United States long involvement in Vietnam at such great cost in blood and treasure is without doubt our most dominant and expensive episode since the Korean

Admiral Strasser holds a B.S. from the Naval Academy, two master's degrees from The Fletcher School, Tufts University and, from the same school, a **Ph.D.** in political science. **He** was graduated from the command and staff course at the Naval War College in 1972. He commanded the USS *O'Callahan* (FF 1051), **Destroyer** Squadron 35, Cruiser-Destroyer Group 3, and Battle Group Foxtrot. **His** seven years in Washington include two years in the office of the Chairman, JCS.

War. The shifting of the economic center of gravity and our major trade partners from Europe to East Asia has also served to focus our thoughts toward this area of the globe.

The Middle East and Southwest Asia have been of major concern to all Americans over the past two and a half decades. The Arab-Israeli conflict, wars between India and Pakistan and between Iran and Iraq, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the seizure of our embassy in Iran and the Beirut bombing of the Marine compound, terrorism and the West's energy needs, and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait are just some of the primary factors that have riveted the United States attention to this critical region.

Africa has also produced its share of problems for the United States. Events in South Africa have called for a great deal of our political and diplomatic energies, while Colonel Khadafi's active support of terrorism and war against his neighbors have required military vigilance as well as economic and defense assistance to his victims. Civil war in Angola and the great humanitarian needs of Ethiopia and the Sudan have often been on center stage.

While the Cuban problem, recent events in Panama, the long civil wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua, and our operations to stem the "drug flow" to our southern states have caused Americans to take a hard look at Central America and the Caribbean, the relative calm throughout most of Latin America has allowed us, for the most part, to focus our attention elsewhere. The many problem areas throughout the world which have already been discussed simply reinforced this tendency.

Two of our presidents during this century have taken a particularly active interest in Latin America. Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy" and John F. Kennedy's "Alliance for Progress" were major factors in creating a reservoir of good will which, although depleted over the years, can still occasionally be drawn on even today. As a midshipman in 1962, I had the opportunity to take part in an exchange program between the Chilean and United States Naval Academies. The following year, as a newly commissioned ensign, I had the good fortune to spend six months aboard the Argentine three-masted sailing ship *ARA Libertad*. I found both experiences fascinating as well as professionally rewarding. Many wonderful friendships were formed in those days which have endured and been renewed throughout the years. During the summer of 1972, following my own graduation from our Naval War College, I had the opportunity to speak at the Naval War Colleges of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and Venezuela. I am certain that I benefited from the good feelings created among the Latin Americans by the policies implemented by the United States during the Roosevelt and Kennedy administrations. The hospitality and friendships which I experienced during these exchange programs were warm and cordial, and I came away from these experiences with the firm conviction that our neighbors to the south wanted to be our friends.

Latin American navies in particular were very pro-United States at that time and, in my judgment, remain so. Much of the equipment employed then by the Latin American naval forces was of U.S. origin. Ships and aircraft for the most part had been procured in this country, and consequently the United States was relied on for spare parts and schooling. It was unusual to encounter an officer of the grade of lieutenant or above who had not been to the U.S. for some technical education or tactical training. This is no longer the case. Restrictions placed on our ability to provide military equipment, and in some cases training, to Latin American countries have caused them to look elsewhere. Many younger Latin officers now go to Europe for technical schooling since a great deal of their modern hardware comes from our NATO allies. This has served to lessen our influence throughout the region.

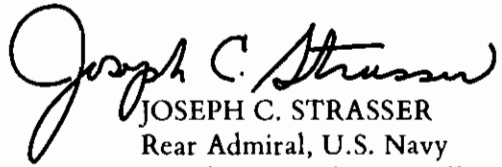
President Bush's recent trip to several Latin American countries sent a strong signal of United States interest in the area. This trip included visits to Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile, all of which have recently experienced peaceful, democratic changes of government, as well as to Venezuela, which has a long experience of tranquil governmental transition; and it shows that even during a time of great change in Europe and the Soviet Union, and while managing a crisis of global import in the Arabian Gulf arena, the president felt it important to demonstrate the vital nature of United States relations with our hemispheric partners.

Over the years, and despite the previously mentioned restrictions, the U.S. Navy has worked hard to maintain a close relationship with its Latin American counterparts. Since 1959, naval units from the United States have circumnavigated South America on an annual basis. During these Unitas cruises, bilateral and multilateral exercises are conducted to hone the abilities of all participants to operate together and, should it be necessary, to contribute in a combined way to hemispheric defense.

In October we completed the nineteenth in a series of Inter-American War Games. The control team, composed of representatives from all participants, assembled in Newport, while active game players worked at their respective naval war colleges throughout the Americas. This exercise is of great value in promoting hemispheric solidarity and increases the confidence of all participants in their ability to communicate and operate together. This year's Inter-American War Game will be hosted by the Argentine Naval War College.

Experiences such as these, and the exchange programs in which I was fortunate enough to participate and which are still ongoing today, as well as attendance at one another's naval war colleges and other schools (which will be the subject of a future President's Notes) all serve to strengthen the ties between the navies and the nations of the Americas. There is no doubt that the United States has global interests which must be carefully managed

if we are to enjoy the peace, security and stability which we all desire. It is equally certain that events within our own hemisphere will have a tremendous impact on our future well-being. We as a nation and a navy must continue to dedicate ourselves to keeping close ties with our friends in this hemisphere.



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